

QUESTION OF "PRINCIPALITIES" AND "POWERS" IN EPHESIANS
Answered by Willis E. Bishop in a 1986 Class

Turn to Ephesians 1:18: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints; and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power [there are our words] and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

The question: what is the meaning of "principality" and "power"? I think that here it's referring to all rule and all authority in general -- whatever rule and authority there is in the universe. God raised Christ by seating Him in the heavenly places far above all that rule and that authority.

Now turn to Ephesians 3:8: Unto me [that is, Paul], who am less than the very least of all saints is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the ages had been hidden in God who created all things by Christ Jesus, to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known through the church the manifold wisdom of God.

Without going into some of the background of the chapter, let me suggest to you that I understand this "mystery" to refer to the body which we call the Church, that which the Lord began on Pentecost and which He is building today -- believers of every nation, tongue and tribe. The Apostle Paul says in verse 5 and in the middle of verse 9 that this was not known in ages gone by. Don't go into the Old Testament to find the Church -- it isn't there.

In the Gospels the Church mentioned twice but in the future tense. The Church did not begin until Acts chapter 2, and even then they did not understand that. The Apostle Paul says, "The Lord laid His hand upon me in particular to make known this truth which was hidden in previous ages." It wasn't even known by the "principalities and powers in heavenly places," verse 10. Paul says, "to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known through the church the manifold wisdom of God." I understand (and again this is my own opinion) the "principalities and powers" here are referring to the holy angelic realm -- angels, cherubim, seraphim, whatever is there -- even they were not aware of the truth of the body of Christ which is called the Church, and which was not revealed until the time of the Apostle Paul.

Now Ephesians 6:11: Put on the whole armor of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil: for we wrestle not against flesh and blood [that is, against human beings],

but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Here again we have "principalities and powers." The context, at least to me, very clearly indicates here the realm of Satan and his demons. "We wrestle against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness in this age, against spiritual wickedness in high places" -- I think in this passage it refers to the realm of Satan.

The Scripture gives us a little history of Satan. He of course was originally in heaven. Then he is thrown out -- the Lord in Luke 10 says, "I saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven." In Ezekiel 28 we find that Satan had been in a position of tremendous power; I would say that he was vice president of the universe. He became proud, and because of that pride he rebelled against God, and God threw him out. Paul mentions that also, that we must be careful that we do not become proud or else we'll fall into the condemnation of the devil, which was pride.

Now Satan's realm is in the heavenlies. He's called the "prince of the power of the air." A number of years ago a man whom I would call an outstanding liberal had a radio broadcast across the United States. On one occasion the announcer said, "I have the pleasure to introduce to you the prince of the power of the air." He was of course saying, "Here's this great fellow on the radio and I'm glad to present him." He was saying more truth than he realized because that fellow in all that he denied with regard to the Word of God was certainly, in sheep's clothing, a good representative of Satan. Satan's realm right now is the realm of the air.

In Revelation we find that Satan will be cast down to the earth, then he will be put in the bottomless pit -- the abyss -- then he'll be released for a little season and then put into the Lake of Fire. He has a tremendous host that have followed him in his rebellion. The Apostle Paul is saying here, "We are fighting not against flesh and blood but against Satan and his kingdom and his hosts." So, I think that in Ephesians 6:12 the Apostle Paul is referring to that realm of Satan.

To summarize: The first use in Ephesians (1:21) would be all realms of power and authority. Christ has been raised above all of them as He sits at the right hand of the Father. In the second case (Ephesians 3:10), that which was not known before, not even by the angelic hosts of heaven, is now revealed in the truth of the Church. In Ephesians 6:12, I think the phrase refers to the Satanic realm.